

VZCZCXRO7924  
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSL RUEHSR  
DE RUEHSQ #0477/01 2731342  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 301342Z SEP 09  
FM AMEMBASSY SKOPJE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8559  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE 0557  
RUESEN/SKOPJE BETA  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SKOPJE 000477

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/29/2014  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [MK](#) [KV](#) [AL](#) [BU](#)  
SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: ENCYCLOPEDIA STIRS UP INTER-ETHNIC  
TENSIONS

Classified By: CDA THOMAS NAVRATIL FOR REASONS 1.5 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: The release of the first ever Macedonian National Encyclopedia by the government-funded, nearly ethnically homogeneous Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts has caused uproar in the ethnic-Albanian community and provoked reactions from Macedonia's neighbors. The encyclopedia asserts that U.S. and Britain forces trained Albanian rebels in 2001, and is full of other outlandish allegations and littered with ethnically derogatory terminology. Prime Minister Gruevski's unwillingness to distance himself or the government from the content of the encyclopedia in the week following its release had caused a rift in the ruling coalition and prompted senior members of ethnic-Albanian coalition party DUI to threaten withdrawal from the government and to intensify their own rhetoric against their ethnic-Macedonian partners. A long overdue meeting and positive joint press statement between both coalition partners on September 29 will hopefully now begin to ease tensions.(End Summary)

12. (SBU) Background: On September 16 the Macedonian Academy of Science and Art (MANU) released the first edition of the Macedonian National Encyclopedia. MANU, funded by the Ministry of Culture, was established in 1967 as the highest scientific, scholarly and artistic institution in the country. Only one ethnic-Albanian serves on MANU's board of directors. The encyclopedia is the culmination of a seven year project that, according to MANU, brought together the research of 260 associates of the Macedonian Language Institute, an institute within the language department of Skopje's main university which serves as the regulatory body of the Macedonian Language. The project was overseen by a seventeen person board of editors headed up by Editor-in-Chief Blaze Ristovski, a former professor of literature and history at the university. A list of the encyclopedia's board of editors identifies three ethnic-Albanian board members; however one passed away in 2007, another adamantly denies having taken any part in the encyclopedia and the other has been silent.

-----  
HISTORY: IN OUR OPINION...  
-----

13. (SBU) A very limited number of these encyclopedias have been published so far and very few people have actually managed to get a hold of one. However the media has seized upon a number controversial facts, provocative allegations and ethnically derogatory references within the encyclopedia's text. Three especially controversial areas are the encyclopedia's allegations that the U.S. and British militaries trained and supported the ethnic-Albanian National Liberation Army (NLA) during the 2001 conflict, references to DUI party leader Ali Ahmeti as a refugee and war criminal, and the use of ethnically derogatory terms and questionable

assertions to detail ethnic-Albanian history in Macedonia.

-----  
THIS JUST IN: ALBANIAN INSURGENTS TRAINED BY U.S. AND  
BRITISH FORCES  
-----

14. (C) The encyclopedia alleges that 7,000 members of NLA were trained in military camps in Kosovo and Albanian by British and American forces. The authors used newspapers and Wikipedia as the source of the allegation, according to press reports. The U.S. Embassy and the British Embassy both issued responses to the media immediately following the revelation of these allegations. The British Ambassador told the press the allegations were "false" and urged "MANU to edit (the encyclopedia)." We told the press that the "allegations...were baseless and outrageous." The U.S. and British Embassies followed those statements with a joint letter to the President of MANU Georgi Stardelov on September 23 citing the claims as "unfounded and false," expressing "disappointment" at MANU for making "such baseless claims" and urging a retraction. MANU has not responded to date. The editor-in-chief of a pro-government daily claimed U.S. and British pressure has been the driving force behind the broader reaction to the Encyclopedia's content.

-----  
ALBANIANS: HILLBILLY INVADERS FROM THE NORTH  
-----

15. (C) The encyclopedia makes references to ethnic-Albanians as Shqiptari (a well-known derogatory term for Albanians when

SKOPJE 00000477 002 OF 003

used in Slavic languages) and "mountain people," and alleges Albanians first arrived in Macedonia at the end of the 18th century. It claims Albanians, from a Geg tribe in Northern Albania, forcefully invaded Macedonia, "terrorizing" Macedonians and banishing them from their homes. The encyclopedia also refers to Mother Teresa (widely considered of ethnic-Albanian descent) as a Vlach, and to the Albanian community's most honored and cherished historical figure, Gjergji Kastriot Skanderbeg, as a Slav. These references have sparked outrage across the entire ethnic-Albanian community. Every ethnic-Albanian political party, as well as virtually all ethnic-Albanian academics and organizations, have made public statements condemning the encyclopedia. Those statements have included requests that Albania block Macedonia's NATO bid, and demands that the Government withdraw the Encyclopedia and/or publicly condemn its content. Albanian PM Sali Berisha reportedly told Macedonian President Gjorgji Ivanov at their bilat on the margins of UNGA that the encyclopedia "falsifies history and holds an absurd and unacceptable position." Kosovo's Speaker of Parliament Jakup Krasniqi responded with sarcastic criticism directed at the ongoing ethnic-Macedonian debate over its own origins, inquiring as to whether the Macedonian authors were descendants of Alexander the Great, Samuil of Bulgaria or merely a creation of Josip Tito. The Bulgarian Embassy in Skopje also joined the din, releasing a special statement that the encyclopedia inaccurately depicts Bulgarian history and is unacceptable from a country with NATO and EU ambitions.

-----  
A WEDGE IN THE COALITION  
-----

16. (C) Ethnic-Albanian ruling coalition party DUI (already under fire from opposition parties for its relative inability to influence its ethnic-Macedonian counterparts) found itself in a particularly difficult predicament following the encyclopedia's release. Deputy Prime Minister Abdylaqim Ademi told us he initially discussed the contents of the encyclopedia with the PM and the PM's Chief of Staff following its release and believed they had come to terms on

a joint statement that would distance the government from its contents. However, the initial statement released by the government was significantly watered-down and was not sufficient for DUI. In response, DPM Ademi made his own statement to the press "as a representative of the ethnic-Albanian ministers in government" condemning the encyclopedia's content. He also announced that DUI, and party leader Ali Ahmeti, would sue MANU for the encyclopedia's inaccuracies concerning Albanians and its allegations that Ahmeti was a war criminal. During an interview in Tirana Ahmeti went so far as to say, "The armistice between Albanians and Macedonians following the 2001 conflict has now been broken." Charge expressed U.S. concern over this escalation in rhetoric; Ahmeti replied that the context of his statement made clear that he intended no threat.

-----  
PM OBSTINATE  
-----

17. (C) PM Gruevski, who attended the release ceremony and praised the publication of the encyclopedia, stating that it "authentically scans the Macedonian point of view on the cultural, national and political past of the country," was reluctant to take any stance on its content as the public outcry continued to escalate. The PM repeatedly reiterated that MANU is an independent organization that produced the encyclopedia without GoM involvement or review. He said the disputed facts should be debated in a scientific forum. Privately, the PM's CoS, Martin Protoger, told us the encyclopedia was a joke that draws on sources with no credibility, and said the government was considering shutting down MANU and starting over. However, until recently it appeared the PM would not publicly take such a strong stance. In response to the outcry over the encyclopedia, MANU indicated that it would reevaluate the disputed parts of the encyclopedia and add clarification where necessary for the next edition, but insisted it would not change any of the existing text or withhold the publication of the first edition.

-----  
ADVOCATING DIALOGUE  
-----

SKOPJE 00000477 003 OF 003

18. (C) Throughout this flap, we weighed in repeatedly with Gruevski and Ahmeti's close advisors that they should meet and find a way to put this issue behind them. We issued the following public statement on September 29: "The focus of American efforts in the Republic of Macedonia is to encourage and support the development of a successful, thriving member of the Euro-Atlantic community. The publication of MANU's encyclopedia has spurred several reactions, including our own, to erroneous, insulting or otherwise problematic passages. Macedonia is a multi-ethnic state, and as citizens, politicians, and media here respond to the controversy stemming from the shortcomings of this publication we urge that they focus constructively on Macedonia's long-term goals." Also on September 29, Charge texted PM Gruevski to urge constructive leadership and ask if Charge could tell Ahmeti in their meeting scheduled later that day that the PM was willing to meet Ahmeti. At the end of the day PM Gruevski texted back a message of appreciation for U.S. help.

-----  
FINALLY, COMMUNICATION AT THE TOP  
-----

19. (C) Continuing heated rhetoric from inside and outside Macedonia combined with the PM's stubborn reluctance to address the content of the encyclopedia allowed this controversy to continue until the PM and Ahmeti finally

called a meeting on September 29, nearly two weeks after publication. Immediately following his meeting with the PM, Ahmeti told Charge he was pleased with the result. The two leaders came to terms on a joint press statement which stated that this issue "must not influence positive multi-ethnic relations...(or)...impact the country's... Euro-Atlantic aspirations." The statement also marked the first time PM Gruevski made any public critique of the content of the encyclopedia, saying "Both (leaders) expressed their regrets for the insults and the disputable parts of the encyclopedia." Ahmeti also told us that PM Gruevski called the president of MANU during their meeting and they agreed that MANU would immediately suspend additional sales of the encyclopedia, the encyclopedia would be withdrawn, and a bi-ethnic group of experts would be formed to rewrite the encyclopedia. Ahmeti expressed mild skepticism that MANU would actually follow through with the agreement.

-----  
COMMENT:  
-----

¶10. (C) We consider the meeting on September 29 and the resulting press statement very positive developments that will help contain the damage. We will monitor the public reaction to the statement. Although hot rhetoric surrounding this issue will probably linger for some time, we expect overall tensions will begin to dissipate. The encyclopedia may simply reflect the biased opinions of a group of bigoted "scientists" trying to create their own history of Macedonia, but the intense, widespread reactions from both sides of the ethnic divide show the acute sensitivity surrounding issues of identity and history. Multi-ethnic harmony in Macedonia remains fragile. The joint statement by Gruevski and Ahmeti should shelve speculation that DUI is considering leaving the coalition for the time being, but opposition ethnic-Albanians will likely take advantage of this issue politically and accuse DUI of caving to their partners yet again. If many ethnic-Albanians decide the joint statement by Gruevski and Ahmeti is further evidence of DUI's weakness in government then pressures on DUI and political divisions within the Albanian community may actually intensify. In our conversations, ethnic-Albanian leaders seem acutely aware of this possibility and say they are intent on resisting provocation or further factioning, but their patience regarding progress on the overall ethnic Albanian agenda, which includes NATO and EU membership as top goals, is clearly wearing thin. This situation shows how difficult it is to reign in their own rhetoric if significantly provoked.  
(End Comment)

NAVRATIL